

A PRACTICAL SCHEME TO SETTLE THE DP's

With Malice to None, with Profit to All

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Readers will have to decide for themselves whether this arresting proposal comes from the imprisoned emotion of one of the world's displaced or from the bad conscience of an American.

I WAS born in Riga in the year 1907 of respectable parents, and my father, a small merchant ambitious for his children, early directed me towards study that I might make some name for myself in one of the professions. As it fell out, I rose no higher than the post of school-teacher, never mingled in politics, and by discretion and uncommon luck survived the vicissitudes of the war years 1939-41, during which so many men more prominent disappeared. In the year 1942, after some months of vain hope that I might keep myself unnoticed, I was seized and taken off to the mines near Essen where I lived and labored until the "liberation," when I was put into the camp.

It was after three years of misery, hopelessness, and despair in this latter place, where I still remain, that there first came to me—not suddenly but following interminable nights of brooding and anguish—an arresting idea. This idea impressed itself so deeply into my mind that I am never wholly free of it. I propose to relate it in detail here, in the hope of mitigating in some measure the troubles of mankind, whom I have observed to be in a state of very considerable suffering.

I RESORT to this introduction solely that I be not misunderstood. The aspersion has been cast about that I am not altogether a person of sane mind. I cannot appeal to the friends of my early life for witness, they being either dead or trans-

ported, but I can insist as a man of truth that my life has never shown aberration. My father, I am convinced, would even now remark as he used to: that, if anything, I suffer from an extreme deficiency of imagination, and an excessive timidity. As for the notion, which I have heard whispered about, that I intend to make personal profit from my scheme, I take it upon myself to deny the accusation entirely.

It is true I intend to offer myself for sale to the Americans; but I do not plan to offer myself for sale at any higher a price than anyone else. And I undertake to labor honestly, faithfully, and loyally at the meanest work for the rest of my days. In return I ask only one thing, that I be allowed to move from a place where I no longer have any wish to remain.

But here I would not anticipate, but would rather indicate the steps whereby I was led to my discovery. For some time, being a Jew, I entertained hopes of moving to Palestine and at one time even managed to get myself onto a waiting list of illegal immigrants. But the immigrants were, almost all of them, discovered and turned back into other camps, and before long warfare settled upon Palestine, and all my hopes came to nothing.

At this juncture, it came to me that my thoughts had been unwisely restricted. There is not one person in five at the camp who could go to Palestine, and I am sure Professor Valkunas, who is not Jewish, suffers here as much as I or Dr. Stein.

Indeed, I learned from Professor Valkunas, who is a historian of international reputation, that there are fifty people outside camps for every one inside them who

are desperate to move somewhere—one out of five Frenchmen, twenty-two percent of the Dutch, possibly fifteen million Italians, unnumbered millions of Central Europeans, still greater numbers of Asiatics, and even a million Englishmen. I am assured that there are plenty of places, underdeveloped or underpopulated, for these millions to go to: namely, Alaska, Canada, Australia, the Guianas, Brazil, Argentina, other parts of Latin America, the highlands of Africa, Madagascar, Soviet Asia, and particularly the undersettled United States.

But as things now stand there is no hope of any of us moving to any of these places, there no longer existing any right to move nor any country that welcomes men who wish to move. This state of things, I am told by an acquaintance who lived several years in America, is the consequence of the United States Immigration Act, which has been a model for the rest of the countries, all of whom passed laws against the very people who want most to migrate.

Upon receiving this information, I undertook to discover how such an act could exist in a country always, as I had heard, devoted to the idea of freedom. I must report that I found no sensible reasons whatsoever. On the contrary, I found every sensible reason why there should be no such act. It appears that industrial systems require ever-increasing numbers of people, and that without growth any economy, whether capitalist, socialist, or statist, falters and fails. It appears that immigration is the way by which a correct balance is struck between numbers of men, amounts of land, and quantities of machines, all of which are scattered unevenly over the world. It appears further that immigration has always adjusted itself to good times and bad times and has even served to decrease unemployment in times of depression. It appears also that immigrants are very little given to crime and very much given to education. It even appears that they are excellent propagandists for the country to which they move.

This latter fact appearing to me difficult of belief, I applied to Professor Valkunas, who said that America was more widely and exactly known in Europe in the 19th century through the letters of immigrants than it is now known through the efforts of news agencies. He assured me that a campaign had been carried on among Americans of Italian ancestry to write anyone they could remember about their country's interest in world-wide freedom—a difficult undertaking, I should think, inasmuch as very few Italians have got into the United States in the last thirty years.

BUT this is to digress from my main point: there are no sensible arguments why an immigrant should not go where he wants whenever he wants. But the arguments advanced are not for that reason without weight.

Indeed, if I am to judge by what is written in America, the best business men, the best scholars, and the best citizens all go about denying that there should be such a thing as the right to move. I may not be believed, but the fact is true, that Americans think that their young country is mature and that it no longer has any chance to grow. Few of their scholars admit that any good is to be gained by further immigration into the country, and practically none of their businessmen understand that money is to be gained by settling immigrants in colonial projects abroad. There is much talk of solving the problems of a country within the boundaries of a country, and there is much use of the word "homogeneity." This last, I understand, is a polite term for prejudice; in its name sane men of learning have said that there should not have been any immigration into the United States after the year 1800.

Let no man be misled by the agitation current in the United States for some years for the admission of displaced persons, in which almost every important

religious, labor, and civic body in that country has joined. Few if any voices have been heard speaking for the principle and the utility of free immigration. No one has ever proposed admitting more than four hundred thousand people, which is less than one in a hundred of the people all over the world who want to move. Furthermore, not one of these groups has so much as whispered that the Immigration Act itself needs review, so that it would seem that their agitation is a sop to their consciences and not a serious effort to aid immigrants, or to wipe out barriers based solely on race hatred and national animosities. There are, to be sure, some hospitable and well-meaning Americans. But by and large the citizens of that country have become—if one is to judge by the content of their books, newspapers, and magazines—a very cautious and exclusive people, so determined to keep comfort and wealth to themselves that they utterly overlook the possibility of adding to their prosperity by sharing it with foreigners.

Upon reaching this conclusion, as the reader may well understand, I felt a very great lack of heart and even thought to throw over my researches. For it was clear that the key to the problem of immigration was the United States, and that the chief fact about that country was its prejudice against immigrants, a term, I discover to my sorrow, that is sometimes confused with the word *Jews*. Deeply perplexed, I sought out Dr. Stein, who, having studied much of psychology, was able to assure me that prejudice was more easily dealt with by unreason than reason, and that if I wished in truth to aid my fellow sufferers I had better find some device of stronger appeal to prejudice than the prejudices themselves.

I therefore undertook, with the aid of Professor Valkunas, a study of the past to see whether history might not suggest some suitable instrument for the relief of our present distress. And indeed, going back to an earlier century, I did discover a meth-

od of immigration as much better than any proposed today as life is better than death, a method, moreover, potentially so attractive to the conservative, self-seeking mentality of present-day Americans, that I decided to urge its adoption.

I do not refer, of course, to the practices of the 19th century, when, if we may believe writers of those times, immigration was genuinely free. It was clearly apparent that such wild practices would involve too great a change. They would mean giving men of the present century a degree of freedom which they could scarcely comprehend; they would wreck the entire system of states, upset the propagandists, confuse the politicians, confound the bigots; and—so far as immigrants are concerned—might be as perilous to them as feeding starving men on high foods.

The device I here propose for the alleviation of our sufferings is nothing so millennial as freedom but something at once practical and beneficial that I found in a still earlier century: I mean slavery.

EVEN at that the proposal may seem at first blush too idealistic and utopian. So low has the value of human beings sunk, that most Americans will find it hard to conceive of anyone paying money out of his own pocket to bring immigrants into his country. But history shows that such a condition actually flourished, particularly in the United States, only two hundred years ago. Indeed there was a brisk and active traffic in white indentured servants and Negro slaves, who, once they arrived in their new land, were cared for with as much attention as the best machinery is cared for today.

Critics of the carping sort will undoubtedly suggest that so careful a concern for human flesh and blood betokens a state of things too halcyon for a modern man to endure, and that the practices of the 18th century are only a whit less out of tune with our own than those of the 19th. But I humbly submit from my own study that this is not the case. Slavery is not

in all respects comfortable to slaves; on the contrary, it represents no great break with the moral principles now prevalent in many countries. And yet, miserable as is bondage, it is still immeasurably superior to the lot of the displaced and oppressed today.

But the chief merit of the proposal is that, once it is understood, it is bound to appeal instantly to the American mentality. And this is essential, since Americans, today in possession of most of the wealth of the world, are the only people alive with resources enough to buy slaves and maintain them in some decency.

For, while Americans may be greatly prejudiced against immigrants, they are greatly prejudiced in favor of whatever brings increased comfort and possessions. And since it is these material advantages, I submit, that would accrue from the keeping of slaves, it is reasonable to suppose that Americans might in this way be brought to shower upon immigrants such solicitude and care as it has not occurred to them to give them in the past fifty years. Furthermore, there is clear gain in substituting the term *slave*, which lacks emotional connotations, for the term *immigrant*, which in the United States has long been provocative of temper and heat.

There are, by Professor Valkunas' computation, some sixty million persons who urgently need to move from their present hopeless state as displaced persons or surplus population in countries too poor to afford them a home. From this number I subtract ten million sick, dying, and those otherwise unable to take advantage of the opportunity offered. Of the remaining fifty million, I estimate that at least fifteen million could be comfortably enslaved in the United States. For I understand that there are at least five million jobs that are thought dirty, inferior, or otherwise objectionable, as for instance, mining, janitoring, street-cleaning, stone masonry, gardening, plastering, and even barbering, all of which occupations are now said to be short of men. European

slaves will be as happy to assume such jobs as Americans now in them will be happy to leave them for commission-selling, hair-waving, ushering, and radio repairing.

Indeed, I believe my estimate of five million to be low, inasmuch as I include in it much-needed slave labor for American farms—but I choose to err on the side of conservatism. Similarly low is my next figure: five million domestic slaves for American households. And, in view of the demand for workers created by the production needs of the European Recovery Plan, I do not believe that a figure of five million industrial slaves is in any sense too high.

As for the remaining thirty-five million, profit can be had by occupying them as workers and agriculturalists in colonies in various favored but underdeveloped spots of the world. Capitalists in America will be the more ready to make use of immigrants abroad once they learn in their own country how profitable the owning of slaves can be. I confess I anticipate the greatest success in colonial projects, for it will be possible to employ Asiatics in the fields and Europeans in the mines and industries in numbers which racial prejudice makes impossible in the United States, no matter how attractive the profit. I can envisage a time when slaves are happily working minerals in New Guinea, when other slaves are reaping crops in the fertile lowlands of Brazil, and when a great slave civilization will flourish in the now uninhabited areas of Canada and in the uplands of Africa. As for obstacles interposed by immigration laws, I see none of them. Slaves are productive items, like machinery, not persons, and their admission will require no change in any existing regulation.

I AM aware that I shall be told that the price of even so hopeful an enterprise would be too high, that at present steamship rates two billion dollars would be involved simply for the transportation of fifty million people, a sum that no nation

would consider spending save for some purpose of war or diplomacy. Let me point out in answer: first, that no immigrant mindful of his present condition would name a purchase price higher than the cost of his transportation; second, that steamship lines would undoubtedly come forward with discounts for mass shipments; and third, that the purchasers of the slaves would not be the American government but individual Americans. In few cases would the cost per slave exceed two hundred dollars f.o.b. New York or San Francisco. The prospective market would include millions of farmers, contractors, housewives, mine operators, corporations, and capitalists, the last named of whom have long had more funds than they know how to invest.

It may be argued that even wealthy people are unlikely to go to the expense of two hundred dollars simply for the sake of one human soul, but I submit that Americans of the most average means nowadays spend roughly as great a sum for a small refrigerator, a cheap fur coat, a two weeks summer outing, or an engine overhaul for their automobile. Furthermore, my proposal is directed not at men of charity but at men of business. Gain is to be had in setting up wholesale slave agencies and installment finance companies, and the anticipated income from advertising ought to enlist the efforts of agencies of the highest standing. Finally, slaves could be carried as assets in company books, which, I regret to say, are now so inhumanly kept as to give no indication of the value of laboring human beings. I ask the reader to speculate as to the happy possibilities for manipulation of financial statements by writing up or writing down slave assets.

Dr. Stein has made a criticism of my proposal, pointing out that the apparent advantages are all on the side of the immigrants, for slavery will give them precisely what they now lack most: namely, a chance to move, useful work, and a sense of being of some value, not to mention decent habitation and some food and clothes. Furthermore, the care with which Americans look

after their automobiles and their front lawns suggests that there may even arise a certain competitive display in the matter of slave care, a family or a corporation taking actual pride in the health and appearance of its chattels.

That my scheme offers high encouragement to immigrants and particularly to those in a position similar to that of Dr. Stein and myself, I will in no wise deny. The three millions of us who are desperately displaced persons or refugees are all of us without exception cooped up in camps, abandoned, forgotten, unwanted, and forbidden either to work or even to hope to get work. Some of us once were farmers, many of us men of trade, and not a few practitioners of professions, but now we do not exist as anything at all. We belong nowhere, not to the place where we were born, not to the place where we lived, not even to the wretched barracks where we now exist. We are not even persons in the legal sense, and there is but one known way for any of us to become such, namely, to commit some crime under circumstances that will make possible our admission to prison. But even this boon is denied us. The police are uncooperative. We are too many, and the opportunities for obvious crime too few. There is thus no hope for us at all, for no one will admit that we need to eat, work, and exist as recognized living beings. To live in some actual place, to be wanted for some real work—these advantages that slavery would grant us are almost unimaginably in excess of anything any of us have for many years allowed ourselves to hope for.

BUT were it true that the advantages were all on the side of the immigrants, I would abandon my scheme as being utterly out of step either with practicality or prevailing morals. But there are signal, even though less obvious, advantages to American purchasers. The chief of these advantages—the future growth of the country—will not bear discussion, since Americans are convinced beyond argument that there is no growth to be had. But it is entirely possible

to discuss openly and in specific detail the comfort that would accrue from a cheap and inexhaustible source of willing labor. It is possible to say, without the slightest fear of contradiction, that farmers could see more movies, housewives attend more clubs, and corporations give more time off to their employes for watching sports. Furthermore, the expenditure of some two billions at this time could help get rid of some of the loose money which is of great worry to some Americans in these inflationary days, and, inasmuch as the expenditure would serve as a business deduction on the income tax, it would satisfy other Americans who think there is not loose money enough.

Let no man, therefore, talk to me of better solutions, as for instance that the United States should revise its immigration laws, on grounds of fairness, justice, or humanity, or out of respect for the ancient principles of freedom, equality, or brotherhood, or that business men should establish colonies of free immigrants throughout the world. I have studied all such alternatives and know them to be impractical. And while it is true that the world has as much chance for growth as it had two hundred years ago, it is evident that the world thinks it has not, and psychological predilections, I have learned, are not to be overcome by simple discussion. Let no one imagine that the Immigration Act of the United States can be altered one jot or one tittle in this 20th century; the miserable fate of even the token legislation proposed for the relief of displaced persons in the American Congress

amply proves that. It is obvious that the racial quota system is a rock to the mental balance of the American people, who, were they to lose that which embodies their prejudices, might only too well lose love of themselves. And since love of self in these days is greater a hundred times over than any contrary affection for others, it is apparently as visionary to conceive of any change in the American mind as it is to believe in the sudden practice at some future time of the principles of religion. Yet I venture to suggest, for the reassurance of the pious, that in slavery religion can in some degree be made manifest, and in a form in no wise offensive or subversive to any man's worldly interests. This was so in an earlier America; it can be done again.

IN PRESENTING my proposal for public consideration, I have but one request: that it not be referred to control boards, committees, commissions, planning boards, or international agencies, as all suggestions on immigration have been referred in the past. If this is done, nothing will come of my proposal, and the world will lose the benefit of an institution that is at once admirably close to the callous and inhumane ways of this world as we know it today—and yet immeasurably better. Let us put our trust in self-interest and free business enterprise!

In our times—our times being what they are—slavery represents progress. Let no man throw away this one surviving chance to rescue mankind from a world fallen into bigotry and autarchy.

Faced with an injustice so monumental as to make ordinary argument seem useless, Jonathan Swift in 1729 published his *Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burden to their Parents or the Country, by Fattening and Eating Them*. HERRYMON MAURER, feeling himself confronted, in the plight of Europe's DP's, by the same kind of inhumanity, has in the above article turned again to the classical weapon of political satire. Mr. Maurer might be best described as a "fighting Quaker"; certainly he has been that in his uncompromising advocacy of the right and value of free immigration—notably in his extraordinary article "The Right to Move" in *Fortune* magazine. His book on Gandhi, *Great Soul*, will be published this fall by Doubleday. Mr. Maurer was born in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, in 1914.